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April 12, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

MORI
C05099445FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE
W. R. SMYERSUBJECT: Comment on the CIA/DIA Memo on "NVA
Military Activities during 1971/72"

We understand that a joint CIA/DIA memorandum on "NVA Military Activities during 1971/72" has been heavily used for background material on some of our future projections of enemy activity to be discussed April 13.

We believe that it in fact fails to provide a useful estimate of enemy capabilities and intentions during the coming year. The central reason for this failure is lack of evidence, not imperfect analysis.

-- The memorandum concentrates - to an inordinate degree - on the NVA's ability to move supplies externally through Laos to the South Vietnamese border. However, there is little good evidence on this subject.

There are several problems of evidence:

-- First, and perhaps most important, is the question of consumption rates for enemy forces in South Vietnam and Cambodia. As you may recall from the post-Sihanoukville debate, we really do not know very much about those consumption rates. Our previous assumptions were challenged by the evidence of what came through Sihanoukville, and they have never been adjusted.

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-- Second, is the evidence of truck movements in the panhandle.

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-- Third, we have no estimate of any reliability on the amount of water-borne traffic, although we know that the North Vietnamese have attempted to get more through this route than they have in the past.

- This does not just mean the amount carried by rivers in the panhandle, where Hanoi has made considerable effort, but also the amount which comes in along the coast. We know of one trawler that got through recently, carrying 100 tons. We know that others try. We also do not know how much material may come in over the beaches in Cambodia and the Vietnamese Delta. It stands to reason that some stuff comes through there, and there have been recent reports of this.

The purpose of this memorandum is not to debunk the efforts of the intelligence community and of the analysts who work with the material provided by that community. It is, instead, to point out that we would be fooling ourselves if we accept this work as being truly indicative of enemy intentions and even - beyond a limited degree - of enemy capabilities.

We believe it must be assumed, as a matter of principle, that the North Vietnamese will be prepared to do whatever they can to create some major U.S. public impact by an offensive in South Vietnam during 1972, and that they will be prepared to make considerable sacrifices to do this. They may even be prepared to strip their stockpiles and suffer serious manpower losses.

We know this is risky but they have gambled before. A recent Quan Doi Nhan Dan article indicated that they were again planning to mix major unit offensives in with their lower level of warfare, and we know from other articles that some of the Southern commanders have been urging this.

We therefore suggest that we should move beyond rational quantitative analysis on this and start working with Bunker and with the GVN for a major effort on our side to frustrate and perhaps preempt enemy offensives in South Vietnam during the early part of next year.

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